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Mark Twain's translation of Der Struwwelpeter

by

Marian Fuller Wahl

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa

1980

Perhaps the most popular children's book of all time is Der Struwwelpeter, a short volume of verse for children three to six years of age, which was written and illustrated in 1844 by Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann, a physician of some social standing in Frankfort am Main, Germany. Setting out to buy a picture book suitable for his three year old son, Carl, shortly before Christmas of that year, Dr. Hoffmann found the psychology of the children's literature for sale entirely wrongheaded and brought home an empty copy book to create a picture book of his own instead. Little Carl was delighted with his Christmas present, which was destined to foster an entirely new form of children's literature in Germany, but soon relatives and friends, notably the later publishers of Hoffmann's works, Rütten und Löning, persuaded the surprised author to let his little book appear in print. Based on the drawings that the kindly physician used to humor his littlest patients, when called to their bedside, the book of rhymes was initially titled Lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilder für Kinder von 3-6 Jahren and was an instantaneous success when it was published in January, 1845. In four weeks the first edition, comprising 1500 copies, was exhausted. A second edition was immediately begun and the book's success continued unabated. By 1896, the one hundredth edition had been printed and, to date, literally hundreds of editions of this little book have appeared.

The final version of Der Struwwelpeter, as it is known and loved by millions of German speakers today and which is the edition that Twain translated, contains nine different rhymes and their accompanying illustrations depicting children in the act of misbehaving. In each

rhyme the naughty child has to suffer the consequences of his disobedience. Sometimes, as in the case of the girl who played with matches and the boy who would not eat his soup, the outcome is tragic. However, in the other rhymes, the sad results of their disobedience are sufficient to cure the little people of their folly. A tenth poem is about a hunter who narrowly escapes becoming the victim of the rabbit he set out to shoot.

An eleventh poem is about the Christ Child, bringer of gifts at Christmas time in German-speaking countries, who will present each well-behaved child with lots of presents and a pretty picture book.

As a result of heavy losses on his investment in the ill-fated Paige typesetter, Mark Twain had been obliged to dislodge his family from its handsome Hartford, Connecticut home and take his wife and daughters to live in Europe in July, 1891. Small wonder that he, in this predicament, should conceive of the idea of writing a translation of the famous German children's story book, mentioned above, with a view to duplicating its success in the English-speaking world. An excited letter to Fred J. Hall on October 27, 1891, contains elaborate instructions for the marketing of Twain's translation of Der Struwwelpeter (titled Slovenly Peter), which the author described in his letter to his publisher as "a book for little children 3 to 7 years old,"<sup>1</sup> and which had been the product of "three days and nights" of feverish activity.

Although Twain did not expect the manuscript to reach his publisher until November 7th, he rather unrealistically counseled Hall to place his

<sup>1</sup> Hamlin Lewis Hill, ed., Mark Twain's Letters to His Publishers, 1867-1894 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 287.

translation on the "American market before Dec. 10 - and as long before as possible."<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, by October 28th, 1891, a short twenty-four hours later, Twain's enthusiasm was somewhat abated: "But don't publish at all if your judgment disapproves."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps he realized that his timing for the Christmas season was poor or perhaps he decided, as Hamlin Hill suggests, that the volume was not marketable because "a German language edition of Der Struwwelpeter had already been published in St. Louis by C. Witter in 1862."<sup>4</sup> Or was the now internationally known author disappointed in the translation he had made?

Twain's October 27th letter to Fred Hall, it has been pointed out, describes his little book as suitable for small children; he asks that the English verses be set "in very large and clear type -- as large as possible -- great primer type...."<sup>5</sup> From this, it would seem that Twain meant his translation of Der Struwwelpeter to be read by a young audience. However, an analysis of Twain's Slovenly Peter, as published in 1935 by his daughter Clara Clemens Gabrilowitz, reveals that it is written in language far too difficult for little children to understand. In a foreword to the 1935 edition, Clara Clemens implies that Twain's object in translating Der Struwwelpeter was to present it to his daughters on Christmas 1891. Since, at the time Slovenly Peter was written, Twain's

<sup>2</sup> Hamlin Hill, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> Hamlin Hill, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> Hamlin Hill, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> Hamlin Hill, p. 297.



oldest daughter, Susie, was nineteen and the youngest, Jean, already ten years old, this seems an unlikely possibility, although it is certainly believable that Twain made a present of his translation to his daughters and "seated himself near the tree... [to] read the verses aloud in his inimitable, dramatic manner."<sup>6</sup>

Twain's correspondence with Fred J. Hall leads this writer to maintain that the celebrated author translated Dr. Hoffmann's little volume with a view towards exploiting its commercial possibilities. It may never be known whether Twain truly intended his piece for an audience of three to seven year olds or whether he privately counted on his own fame to sell his translation of Der Struwwelpeter. It is, however, the contention of this essay that Mark Twain's translation of Der Struwwelpeter was addressed to an audience far more sophisticated than that for which the original was intended. A comparison of Twain's translation with this writer's translation of the original Hoffmann text provides the focus for the discussion which follows.

Mark Twain's version of Der Struwwelpeter departs from the original in several important ways. Perhaps less central to the thesis of this paper, but nevertheless noteworthy, are the instances in which Twain has misunderstood the German. As a result of either haste or insufficient German language skills, he made a number of errors.

While the Hoffmann version of the rhyme about the Christ Child states that well-behaved children (those who are quiet "bei den Siebensachen" --

<sup>6</sup> Clara Clemens Gabrilowitz, Foreword, Slovenly Peter by Mark Twain (New York: The Marchbanks Press, 1935), pp. 4-5.

literally "doing (at) their seven things") -- will receive lots of good things and a lovely picture book besides, Twain's translation refers to children who "handle silently their toys" as being the recipients of the Christ Child's gifts. Clearly Twain has taken this idiomatic German term ("... Siebensachen") to mean simply 'toys' or 'playthings.' In actuality, however, the term "Sieben Sachen" has a much broader meaning. In fact, it may be used to describe all the kinds of things with which children occupy themselves -- their games of make believe, their toys, their little duties of combing their hair, of washing, and dressing.<sup>7</sup>

Twain did not recognize German dative plural endings and called his translation of the verses about the Moor, whose outlandish appearance Kaspar, Ludwig, and William heartily laughed at, "The Tale of the Young Black Chap." The Hoffmann title "Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben" would have been more accurately rendered as "The Story of the Black Boys." Clearly, Twain must not have realized that Hoffmann did not consider the Moor to be black; only the naughty boys whom St. Nicholas dipped in the inkwell were referred to as such. The Moor is dressed only in a pair of short pants and carries a parasol, excellent equipment for a tropical climate but sadly out of place in the home town of the three rascals of Hoffmann's nursery rhyme. We sense that a Moor was just about the most outlandish individual Hoffmann could have dreamed up, while Twain's

<sup>7</sup> Although the expression "Hast du Deine Sieben Sachen?" literally (Do you have your seven things?) means "Do you have all your things, all your belongings?" in the context in which he used the term, Hoffmann was actually referring to the little 'concerns' of the 'children's world' when he wrote about their "Sieben Sachen."

version reflects all of the racial concern of his Southern background. While the German writer described the fate of three boys, who had been warned by St. Nicholas about teasing a person from a completely different culture, and who had to suffer the logical consequences of their misbehavior, Twain transforms the original into a plea for tolerance toward the underprivileged and exploited black race he was so familiar with.

A second mistranslation in the same section concerns the lines:

Hoffmann	Literal
<u>Und auch der Wilhelm war nicht steif</u> <u>Und brachte seinen runden Reif.</u>	And William did not stand on ceremony either And brought along his round hoop.

Twain translates these lines as:

While in his wake skips William free,  
With hair neat-combed and hoop, you see.

A figurative meaning of "steif" in regard to deportment is "stiff and starchy, stilted, terribly stiff (od. formal),"<sup>8</sup> and, in the original drawing accompanying these words, William appears to have hair that is neatly combed with a wave that almost sticks out. Perhaps Twain was unable to decipher the original and used the illustrations in order to gain ideas or ferret out the meaning of what may have seemed incomprehensible to him in the German language.

In another verse, the mother of Konrad the thumbsucker tells her boy:

Hoffmann	Literal
<u>Sei hübsch ordentlich und fromm,</u> <u>Bis nach Haus ich wieder komm'.</u>	Be very tidy and good until I get home.

<sup>8</sup>Der neue Muret-Sanders. Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch, Deutsch-Englisch, 2. Band. Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1975.



The German word "hübsch" (literally, "pretty,") serves here as an intensifier for the German "ordentlich" or "tidy." It has the meaning of 'really,' 'very,' or 'truly.' However, Twain knew only the literal meaning and renders his translation as follows:

Try how pretty you can be  
Till I come again," said she.

Again, in the rhyme about Hanns-Stare-in-the-Air, Twain translated the word "Mappe" or "schoolbag" erroneously as "atlas," apparently inspired by the German word's similarity to the English "map":

Hoffmann

Literal

Und die Mappe schwimmt schon weit.

And the schoolbag floats far away.

Twain

Meantime the atlas, gone astray,  
Has drifted many yards away.

As anyone who has attempted translation knows, it is not always easy to render literally an expression from one language to another. And when the translator seeks to duplicate a rhyme scheme and a metrical pattern, this task is often next to impossible. But there were, however, numerous instances in Twain's translations in which he was required to find an American idiom to convey the meaning of the original and in which he succeeded brilliantly. Examples of this success may be seen in various sections of Slovenly Peter, as in "The Story of Flying Robert":

Hoffmann

Literal

Seht! Den Schirm erfasst der Wind.

Look! The wind catches the  
umbrella.

Twain

Hoho! the 'brella's caught the breeze

In the Story of Hanns Stare-in-the-Air, the original reads:

## Hoffmann

Wenn der Hanns zur Schule ging,  
Stets sein Blick am Himmel hing.  
Nach den Dächern, Wolken, Schwalben  
Schaut er aufwärts allenthalben:  
Vor die eignen Füße dicht,  
Ja, da sah der Bursche nicht,  
Also dass ein jeder ruft:  
"Seht den Hanns Guck-in-die-Luft!"

## Literal

When Hans went to school  
 His eyes were always glued to the  
 sky  
 To the roofs, clouds, swallows  
 He looks up in all directions.  
 What was right in front of his  
 feet  
 The fellow did not see,  
 So that everyone shouted  
 "Look at Hans Stare-in-the-Air!"

Twain's rendition is as follows:

Now when this lad to school did go,  
 He never saw what's here below,  
 His eyes were always in the sky,  
 'Mong roofs and clouds and things that fly;  
 He never saw, along the street,  
 The common things about his feet,  
 So people used to cry, "Ah, there!  
 That is Hanns Stare-in-the-Air!"

And in "The Sad Tale of the Match-Box":

## Hoffmann

Paulinchen hört die Katzen nicht!  
Das Hölzchen brennt gar hell und  
licht,  
Das flackert lustig, knistert laut,  
Grad wie Ihr's auf dem Bilde schaut.

## Literal

Little Pauline does not hear the  
 cats.  
 The little matchstick does burn  
 bright,  
 It flickers gaily, crackles loudly  
 Just the way you see it in the  
 picture.

## Twain

Paulinchen heard the catties not,  
 The match did burn both bright and hot,  
 It crackled gaily, sputtered free,  
 As you it in the picture see.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Note that Twain takes some liberties at times to imitate German word order.

Such changes show that Twain had a rare sensitivity to language and some considerable talent in translation.

However skillful some passages of Slovenly Peter may be, it will not be a concern of this paper to discuss this aspect of Twain's translations in any depth. Instead, it is the writer's intention to focus on those differences between the German and American versions which account for the marked disparity in tone and difficulty of Der Struwwelpeter and Slovenly Peter. Four categories of differences are discussed below:

1. Instances in which the translations include levels of diction and syntactic structures which are beyond the reach of Twain's stated intended audience.

2. Instances in which there is intentional use of bad grammar, slang or colloquial terms, and "asides" in Slovenly Peter that are not present in the original.

3. Instances in which Twain has either omitted something of the original meaning or added substantially to the Hoffmann text, contributing to the complexity of Slovenly Peter and changing the intention of the original.

4. Instances in the translations where the simple moral of Dr. Hoffmann's verses is obscured or value judgments are made that do not appear in the original.

## 1. Levels of diction and syntactic structures.

We need go no further than Twain's description of the beloved Struwwelpeter figure himself to find evidence to support the contention that Twain's translation included levels of diction that are beyond the reach of a small child. Twain's vibrant jingle, containing words like 'frowsy,' 'rusty,' 'musty,' 'tow-head,' 'talons,' 'loathe,' 'hail,' and 'modern satyr' would only appeal to a more mature reader. Where Twain employs affective terms such as 'tow-head' and 'talons,' Hoffmann uses the neutral words 'hair' and 'nails.' If a six year old would have some difficulty understanding the word 'disgusting,' he certainly would have problems with 'modern satyr' or verbs like 'loathe' or 'hail.' The German original, a literal translation, and Twain's version of the rhyme in question are presented here for comparison:

Hoffmann	Literal
<u>Sieh einmal, hier steht er.</u>	Look here he stands
<u>Pfui! Der Struwwelpeter!</u>	Ugh! It's Struwwelpeter
<u>An den Händen beiden</u>	(or Shock-headed Peter)
<u>Liess er sich nicht schneiden</u>	He would not let the nails
<u>Seine Nägel fast ein Jahr;</u>	on both his hands be cut
<u>Kämmen liess er nicht sein Haar.</u>	for almost a year.
<u>Pfui! ruft da ein jeder:</u>	He would not let his hair
<u>Garst' ger Struwwelpeter!</u>	be combed.
	Ugh! Everyone shouts:
	Nasty Shock-headed Peter!

## Twain

See this frowsy "cratur"-  
 Pah! it's Struwwelpeter!  
 On his fingers rusty,  
 On his tow-head musty,  
     Scissors seldom come;  
 Lets his talons grow a year,  
 Hardly ever combs his hair,-  
     Do any loathe him? Some!



They hail him "Modern satyr-  
Disgusting Struwwelpeter."

Other examples in which the level of diction is beyond the reach of a young child are found in "The Tale of the Terrible Hunter" in which Twain describes the "furry rascal" as having stolen the hunter's gun and spectacles and as having "hied him hence with these effects." Lines like

Behold the dreadful hunterman  
In all his fateful glory stand!  
He took his game-bag, powder, gun,  
And fiercely to the fields he spun.\*

would be all but incomprehensible to very young readers. A footnote indicated by an asterisk directed the reader, whom Twain addressed as "Baby," to "take notice of this awkward form of speech and never use it. Except in translating." Such editorial notes were obviously meant to regale the more adult reader, since we can hardly expect a young child to take note of, and shy away from, awkward forms of speech that he scarcely understands.

Later in the same jingle, Twain relates that the rabbit's child, who was hiding by the well

...saw the fray,  
And glanced aloft with aspect gay,  
(Unwatchful of the coffee-spray,  
And would have laughed, but changed his mind  
When that hot coffee struck him blind.  
He snatched the spoon and capered out  
With many a baleful murd'rous shout,  
To club to death the clumsy lout  
Who'd brought this accident about;  
But when he saw it was his pa,  
He changed his mind again, aha!

One of the charming aspects of Twain's rendition of the original Hoffmann rhymes is the way in which Twain mingles the "high-falutin" with down-to-earth expressions like "struck him blind," "snatched the spoon," "to club to death," etc. It should be noted, however, that the juxtaposition of "high tone" with the down-to-earth in Twain's jingle has a humorous, almost 'slapstick' effect, far removed from the baleful humor of the original.

Slovenly Peter is replete with rhymes whose level of diction is beyond the reach of children. In the "Tale of the Young Black Chap,"

The three they laugh and scoff and wink  
And mock at that poor Missing Link.... [*italics mine*]

The Moor also 'hoists' his umbrella in the Twain version, while the German states simply that he took his parasol (nahm...seinen Sonnenschirm). In the "Story of Ugly Frederick," the dog is o'ercome by "woe and grief," "desiring some relief." He bites "that brutal boy full sore/ Which made the latter prance and roar."

Again, in "The Sad Tale of the Match-Box," Twain's description of Paulinchen as she discovers the matches is far above the level of understanding of a young child:

As she now through the room did spring,  
All light of heart and soul a-wing,  
She saw where sudden burst on sight  
The things wherewith one strikes a light.  
"Oho," says she, "my hopes awake;...."

The aforementioned verses are only a few of many examples of material that seems to be addressed not to children but to adult readers.

## 2. Bad grammar, slang or colloquial terms, and 'asides.'

Slovenly Peter is replete with examples of bad grammar, slang or colloquial terms and 'asides' that are not present in the original. In "The Tale of the Terrible Hunter," the rabbit "smooched" the hunter's "specs," while "that green old boy" took a nap or, as Twain phrased it, "sought the sod." In the "Tale of the Young Black Chap," Twain resorts to slang in order to achieve a saucy rhyme:

The sun it smote him on his smeller  
And so he hoisted his umbrella.

Twain's opening for the "Story of Ugly Frederick"

O waly me! A waly me!  
Just such a boy I ne'er did see.

is, through the slang expression and the 'aside' it contains, far removed from the Hoffmann original in tone and content:

Hoffmann	Literal
<u>Der Friederich, der Friederich</u> <u>Das war ein arger Wuterich!</u>	O Friederich, O Friederich! He was an awful hothead.

Whereas the message of Hoffmann's rhyme is more or less faithfully rendered at the beginning of Twain's jingle, the American humorist continues through his choice of words to add a ludicrous element to the bitter seriousness of the original:

He caught the flies, poor helpless things,  
Made hoppers of them, minus wings,  
He killed the birds, where'er he could,  
And catless made the neighborhood;  
And worst of all that he did do,  
He banged the housemaid black and blue.

There is no question that Twain lovers would enjoy lines like the above. At the same time, however, it must be apparent that many of Twain's verses

are incomprehensible to children while others would have certainly been considered inappropriate reading material by many parents of the day.



### 3. Omissions or additions causing changes in complexity and intention.

"The Story of Ugly Frederick" is a prime example of how Twain added to the Hoffmann text. Mean Frederick whipped his dog, and when the dog retaliated by biting him, he had to take to his bed and swallow some bitter medicine. Hoffmann's verses describe the incident as follows:

#### Hoffmann

Am Brunnen stand ein grosser Hund  
Trank Wasser dort mit seinem Mund  
Da mit der Peitsch' herzu sich schlich  
Der bitterböse Friederich;  
Und schlug den Hund, der heulte sehr,  
Und trat und schlug ihn immer mehr.  
Da biss der Hund ihn in das Bein,  
Recht tief bis in das Blut hinein.  
Der bitterböse Friederich,  
Der schrie und weinte bitterlich,-  
Jedoch nach Hause lief der Hund  
Und trug die Peitsche in dem Mund  
Ins Bett muss Friederich nun hinein  
Litt vielen Schmerz an seinem Bein,  
Und der Herr Doktor sitzt dabei  
Und gibt ihm bitt're Arzenei.  
Der Hund an Friederichs Tischen sass,  
Wo er den grossen Kuchen ass;  
Ass auch die gute Leberwurst  
Und trank den Wein für seinen Durst.  
Die Peitsche hat er mitgebracht  
Und nimmt sie sorglich sehr in Acht.

#### Literal

A big dog stood at the well  
 And drank water there with his  
 mouth.  
 Then crept up with his whip  
 The extremely cruel Frederick  
 And beat the dog, which yelped  
 a lot  
 And kicked and hit him all the  
 more.  
 Then the dog bit into his leg  
 Very deeply, until it bled.  
 Then, mean Frederick screamed and  
 cried bitterly.  
 However, the dog ran home  
 And carried the whip in his mouth.  
 Now Frederick has to go to bed,  
 Suffered a lot of pain in his leg,  
 And the doctor sits at his side  
 And gives him bitter medicine.  
 The dog sat at Frederick's little  
 table  
 Where he ate the big cake.  
 Ate also the good liverwurst  
 And drank the wine to quench his  
 thirst.  
 He has brought the whip with him  
 And watches over it carefully.

This is how Twain translated Hoffmann's rhyme:

A dog stood drinking at a pump -  
 The way he made that doglet jump!  
 He sneaked upon him unaware,  
 He whacked him here, he whacked him there,  
 He whacked him with all his might and main,  
 He made him howl and dance with pain,  
 Until, o'ercome by woe and grief,  
 The dog, desiring some relief,

Did bite that brutal boy full sore,  
 Which made the latter prance and roar,  
 And then the dog did grab the whip,  
 And with it homeward he did skip.  
 To bed the boy had had to go  
 And nurse his bite and wail his woe,  
 The while the Doctor healing brings  
 And loads him up with drugs and things.  
 And all this time the dog below  
 Sings praises soft and sweet and low  
 O'er Fred'rick's dinner waiting there  
 For Fred'rick (or for Fred'rick's heir).  
 The dog's his heir, and this estate  
 That dog inherits, and will ate.\*  
 He hangs the whip upon the chair,  
 And mounts aloft and seats him there;  
 He sips the wine, so rich and red,  
 And feels it swimming in his head,  
 He munched grateful at the cake,  
 And wishes he might never wake  
 From this debauch, while think by think  
 His thoughts dream on, and link by link  
 The liver-sausage disappears,  
 And his hurt soul relents in tears.

A quick glance at the above lines will show the reader that Twain greatly elaborated on the sections in Hoffmann's verse in which Frederick whips the dog and the dog enjoys Frederick's dinner. Whereas the original states simply that the dog sat down at Frederick's little table, ate the big cake, and also ate the good liverwurst, and drank the wine for his thirst, Twain has the dog "sing praises soft and sweet and low," "sip[s] the wine, so rich and red," feel "it swimming in his head," and munch "grateful at the cake." With these terms, as with the image "link by link the liver-sausage disappears," and "wishes he might never wake from this debauch," Twain has infused his translation with a gourmand's delight not present in the original, and which is, indeed, alien to a child's world.

The references to "Fred'rick's heir" and "this estate/ That dog inherits and will ate.\*" are not only foreign to the original German text

but are sophisticated terms for any child to understand. And Twain's comments on the un-grammatical "will ate"

My child, never use an expression like that. It is utterly unprincipled and outrageous to say ate when you mean eat, and you must never do it except when crowded for a rhyme. As you grow up you will find that poetry is a sandy road to travel, and the only way to pull through at all is to lay your grammar down and take hold with both hands.

M.T.

certainly indicate that every line of this supposed note to a child contains concepts beyond the grasp of any young child. It seems likely that Twain, in an attempt to redeem his forced rhyme "will ate," appended a note that was only superficially addressed to a child, but which he calculated would put the more mature readers of his work in stitches.

The final line of Twain's jingle, "And his hurt soul relents in tears" is not found in the German rhyme and is clearly an expression that children of a tender age would find hard to understand. It appears simply to have occurred to Twain as a good rhyme for his clever image "link by link the liver-sausage disappears...." The lines "He hangs the whip upon the chair,/ And mounts aloft and seats him there," seem more to have been suggested by the illustrations to the original Der Struwwelpeter. The Hoffmann text states simply that the dog "has brought along the whip and watches it very carefully" as though to be sure it will not be misused again by malicious Frederick.

Through changes in tone and through some additions to the original German text, Twain's "The Tale of the Terrible Hunter" is very different from Hoffmann's "Geschichte vom wilden Jäger." Twain speaks of a "dreadful hunterman" where Hoffmann used the terms "wilder Jäger" or "wild

hunter." It is important to note that "wild" is a word that is frequently used in German to refer to unruly children as in the expression "Seid nicht so wild!" ('Stop that horseplay!').<sup>10</sup> It does not necessarily mean 'ferocious,' but rather 'out of control.' The word wild does, however, burden the hunter's activity with a negative connotation. The reader's sympathy is slightly more with the rabbit, who finally has a chance to get even by letting the hunter have some of his own medicine.

The opening lines to Twain's jingle

Behold the dreadful hunterman  
In all his fateful glory stand!

sound like the beginning of a classical heroic stanza. Twain continues with:

He took his game-bag, powder, gun,  
And fiercely to the fields he spun.

However, the original Hoffmann rhyme states simply that the "wilde" hunter put on his new green jacket, took his knapsack, powderhorn, and flint, and quickly ran out into the field. The adverb fiercely that Twain employed not only presupposes a more sophisticated vocabulary on the part of the reader but endows the hunter with an attribute that Hoffmann probably never intended. The same observations may be made about "smug and trim" used to describe the hunter. When the original rhyme speaks of the sun shining so much that the hunter's gun grew too heavy for him, Twain renders this as:

Full soon the sweat began to run  
And mortal heavy grew his gun.

<sup>10</sup> See Der neue Muret-Sanders, Deutsch-Englisch, 2. Band, p. 1803.



Aside from what may have seemed, to the reading public of Twain's day, an indelicate reference to perspiration, it seems to this writer that a certain sophistication is necessary for a child to connect the term "sweating" with the idea of the sun shining too much. By the same token, it is hard to imagine the expression "mortal heavy" making much sense to a six or seven year old.

Lines such as

He sought the sod, that green old boy

seem to be poking fun at the hunter, though the original text does not reveal that intention. Neither was it Hoffmann's intention to portray the rabbit as a spy filled with "evil joy." The original drawing simply shows him sitting unnoticed in the tall grass thumbing his nose at the hunter. The rabbit is more what the Germans would refer to as a 'Lausbub,' a 'scamp' or 'rascal.' The original then states simply:

#### Hoffmann

Der Has ganz heimlich zu ihm lief  
Und nahm die Flint' und auch die  
Brill'  
Und schlich davon ganz leis' und  
still  
Die Brille hat das Häschen jetzt  
Sich selbst auf seine Nas' gesetzt  
Und schiessen will's aus dem  
Gewehr.  
Der Jäger aber fürcht' sich sehr.  
Er läuft davon und springt und  
schreit:  
"Zu hilf', Ihr Leut', zu Hilf',  
Ihr Leut'!  
Da kommt der wilde Jägersmann  
Zuletzt beim tiefen Brunnchen an.  
Er springt hinein, die Not war gross;  
Es schießt der Has die Flinte los.  
Des Jägers' Frau am Fenster sass  
Und trank aus ihrer Kaffeetass'.  
Die schoss das Häschen ganz entzwei,

#### Literal

The rabbit ran unnoticed up to him  
 And took his gun, his glasses,  
 too.  
 And tip-toed away very quietly.  
 Now the little rabbit has the  
 glasses  
 Has put them on his own nose  
 And wants to shoot from the gun.  
 The hunter is very afraid,  
 He runs away and jumps and shouts:  
 "Help, you people! help, you  
 people!"  
 The wild hunter arrives finally  
 at the deep little well.  
 He jumps inside, the danger was  
 great,  
 The rabbit is shooting the gun  
 off.  
 The hunter's wife sat at her  
 window  
 And drank from her coffee cup.

Da rief die Frau: "O wei! O wei!"  
Doch bei dem Brunnchen heimlich sass  
Des Häschens Kind, der kleine Has.  
 Der hockte da im grünen Gras;  
Dem floss der Kaffee auf die Nas'.  
Er schrie: "Wer hat mich da  
verbrannt?"  
Und hielt den Löffel in der Hand.

The rabbit shot it in two.  
 Then the wife cried, "O dear!  
 O dear!"  
 However, the rabbit's child,  
 the little rabbit  
 Sat unnoticed by the well.  
 He crouched there in the green  
 grass.  
 The coffee dripped onto his nose.  
 He cried, "Who burned me?"  
 And held the spoon up in his hand.

Let us compare Hoffmann's characterization of the rabbit father and son to  
 Twain's, as shown in the following lines taken from "The Tale of the  
 Terrible Hunter":

The specs he sets across his nose,  
 And as his joke upon him grows  
 He thinks it would be darling fun  
 To see that hunter skip and run  
 In front of his own stolen gun.  
 He drew a bead, the hunter fled,  
 And fled; and fled! and Fled! and FLED!  
 And howled for help as on he sped,  
 Howled as if to raise the dead;  
 O'er marsh and moor, through glade and dell,  
 The awful clamor rose and fell,  
 And in its course where passed this flight,  
 All life lay smitten dead with fright

At last the hunter struck a well,  
 And in he plump'd with final yell,  
 The very moment that there rang  
 O'er all the place the loud "cheBANG!"

The hunter's wife, with window up,  
 Sat sipping coffee from her cup;  
 The bullet split the saucer clean  
 And scared her to a pallid green.  
 Now by the well in hiding lay  
 The rabbit's child, and saw the fray,  
 And glanced aloft with aspect gay,  
 (Unwatchful of the coffee-spray,)  
 And would have laughed, but changed his mind  
 When that hot coffee struck him blind.  
 He snatched the spoon and capered out  
 With many a baleful murd'rous shout,  
 To club to death the clumsy lout

Who'd brought this accident about;  
 But when he saw it was his pa,  
 He changed his mind again, aha!

Twain has embellished the turnabout scene of rabbit hunting the hunter with phrases like

He howled as if to rouse the dead,  
 O'er marsh and moor, through glade and dell,  
 The awful clamor rose and fell,  
 And in its course where passed this flight,  
 All life lay smitten dead with fright.

While these additions go beyond the scope of the original text, they seem to harmonize with the drawings accompanying that text. On the other hand, in characterizing Hoffmann's placid little rabbit who caught the spoon, was burned by the hot coffee, and who cried out, "Who burned me?", Twain is clearly in the realm of his own imagination (and beyond the scope of the original) when he adds the last twelve lines with the sentiment that he is ready to "club to death the clumsy lout who'd brought this accident about." Until he discovers that it is his own father, it is hard to imagine the little bunny letting out a "baleful murd'rous shout."

Twain saw humor in the fact that the little rabbit backed down, when he realized that it was his own father who had caused him to be burned by the spilled coffee. In Hoffmann, the humor is derived from the fact that the rabbit shot the farmer wife's cup in half and that the baby rabbit caught the spoon. Though the humor is derived from the situation in Hoffmann's rhyme and, at least in part from situation in the Twainian jingle, the American author's rhyme contains a darker kind of humor, reflecting on the disparity of power between father and son, great and small. It is a sneering, almost sardonic kind of humor, totally foreign to and changing the intention of the original German version.

4. Obscuring of Hoffmann's simple morals or the adding of value judgments.

The simple moral of Dr. Hoffmann's verses is obscured in several of Mark Twain's translations. A case in point is "The Sad Tale of the Match-Box," the tragic story of a child who has been warned about playing with matches and who is burned to death as a result of her disobedience. Throughout both Hoffmann and Twain's versions of the rhyme, the kittens Minz and Maunz (Mintz and Mountz) function as a sort of Greek chorus, warning Paulinchen of impending disaster to which, however, the girl remains oblivious. Unfortunately, the serious tone, which Hoffmann maintained throughout this important, life-saving lesson, is disturbed, in the Twainian version, by his tongue-in-cheek treatment of the cats in their sorrowful role. By using diminutives and other childlike word forms, Twain transforms the cats into a sort of mockery of a Greek chorus. What Hoffmann wrote as

## Hoffmann

Und Minz und Maunz die Katzen,  
Erheben ihre Tatzen.  
Sie drohen mit den Pfoten:  
Der Vater hat's verboten!  
Miau! Mio! Miau! Mio!  
Lass stehen! Sonst brennst du  
Lichterloh!

## Literal

And Mintz and Mountz the cats  
 Raise up their paws  
 They warn with their fists  
 Father has forbidden it!  
 Meow! Meow! Leave it alone!  
 Or else you'll catch on fire!

Twain translated as

And Mintz and Mountz, the catties,  
 Lift up their little patties,  
 They threaten with their pawses  
 It is against the lawses!  
 Me-yow! Me-yo! Meyow! Me-yo!  
 You'll burn yourself to ashes, O!



By imitating German word order ("Paulinchen heard the catties not"), together with diminutives, and an occasional expression like "The while the child was frying," -- in short, by an obvious lack of seriousness in the treatment of his subject -- Twain divested the original piece of much of its didactic value. This may not have been his intention because much of "The Sad Tale of the Match-Box" has been most faithfully translated. However, the overall effect is that a subject of life and death importance in the education of young children has been treated in a more-or-less entertaining manner. Where entertainment is made paramount, much of what Hoffmann would have recognized as a great teaching moment must be counted as lost.

And a similar distortion results from Twain's characterization of St. Nicholas in "The Tale of the Young Black Chap" when he has Nicholas "souse" the three urchins "down with Holy spite" and "grim delight." The Nicholas that Twain created seems to be a sadistic sort of demon, whereas the corresponding figure in the original rhyme is the benevolent and highly respected cleric who metes out justice impartially as part of the necessary order of the universe. Further distortion occurs when Twain transforms the original moral -- "If the boys had not laughed so much, Nicholas would not have made them black" -- into:

Now, if they had but hid their glee,  
They's still be white and fair to see.

The message Twain's careless translation conveys is that a person can laugh at the Moor, just so long as no one catches him at it.

Similarly, in the German version of "Story of the Thumbsucker," Hoffmann relates the sad tale of a boy named Konrad, whose mother had

warned him about the tailor who cuts off the thumbs of thumbsuckers with his big shears, and who promptly disregarded all of his mother's warnings as soon as she had left the house. Whereas the German originator of the rhyme lets Konrad experience the logical consequences of his own foolhardiness, Twain enlists our pity for a boy who has been victimized by a "heartless grub" or evildoer. The idea that a heartless grub is the cause of Konrad's downfall, rather than his own folly and disobedience, must be considered a grievous departure from Hoffmann's original intent, limiting the instructional merit a faithful translation of the German rhymes would have had.

"The Tale of Soupy-Kaspar" is told in sophisticated language that is a far cry from the simple declarative sentences of the original. Hoffmann's version and the literal and Twainian translations are presented here for comparison:

## Hoffmann

Der Kaspar, der war kerngesund,  
Ein dicker Bub und kugelrund,  
Er hatte Backen rot und frisch,  
Die Suppe ass er hübsch bei Tisch.  
Doch einmal fing er an zu schrei'n:  
"Ich esse keine Suppe! Nein!  
Ich esse meine Suppe nicht!  
Nein, meine Suppe ess' ich nicht!"

Am nächsten Tag,--Ja, sieh nur her!  
Da war er schon viel magerer.  
Da fing er wieder an zu schrei'n:  
"Ich esse keine Suppe! Nein!  
Ich esse meine Suppe nicht!  
Nein, meine Suppe ess' ich nicht!"

Am dritten Tag, o weh und ach!  
Wie ist der Kaspar dünn und schwach!

## Literal

Kaspar was as healthy as can be,  
 A fat boy, and very round.  
 He had cheeks that were red and  
 fresh looking.  
 He ate his soup nicely at the  
 table.  
 But one time he started to cry:  
 "I won't eat the soup. No!  
 I will not eat my soup!  
 No, my soup I will not eat!"

On the next day -- just look here!  
 He was already much thinner.  
 He began again to cry:  
 "I won't eat the soup. No!  
 I will not eat my soup!  
 No, my soup I will not eat!"

On the third day, O dear O me!  
 How thin and weak Kaspar is.

Doch als die Suppe kam herein,  
Gleich fing er wieder an zu schrei'n:  
"Ich esse keine Suppe! Nein!  
Ich esse meine Suppe nicht!  
Nein, meine Suppe ess' ich nicht!"

Am vierten Tage endlich gar  
Der Kaspar wie ein Fädchen war.  
Er wog vielleicht ein halbes Lot--  
Und war am fünften Tage tot.

But when the soup came in,  
 He immediately began to shout:  
 "I won't eat the soup! No.  
 I will not eat my soup!  
 No, my soup I will not eat!"

On the fourth day at last  
 Kaspar was just like a piece of  
 thread.  
 He weighed perhaps a quarter of  
 a pound,  
 And on the fifth day he was dead.

Twain

Young Kaspar he was kernel-sound,  
 A fleshy cub and barrel-round;  
 Had cheeks all rosy-red and fresh,  
 Was fond of soup -- it added flesh.  
 But finally, with scowling brow,  
 He said he'd strike, and make a row:  
 "No swill for me; I'm not a cow,  
 I will not eat it -- loathe it now;  
 I can't! I won't! I shan't, I vow!"

A day rolled slowly o'er his head --  
 Behold, his flesh began to shed!  
 Yet still his strike he did maintain,  
 And screamed as erst with might and main:  
 "No swill for me; I'm not a cow,  
 I will not eat it -- loathe it now;  
 I can't! I won't! I shan't, I vow!"

The third day came -- lo, once so sleek,  
 Observe him now, how thin and weak!  
 Yet still his flag he feebly flew  
 And hailed that humble dish a-new:  
 "No swill for me; I'm not a cow,  
 I will not eat it -- loathe it now;  
 I can't! I won't! I shan't! I vow!"

The fourth day came, and here you see  
 How doth this little busy bee;  
 He weighed perhaps a half a pound --  
 Death came and tucked him in the ground.

Because of the tongue-in-cheek humor of Twain's jingle, the moral of the original is lost. Where in the Hoffmann version, it is a virtue to eat one's soup and corpulence is looked on as a desirable attribute, Twain

makes Kaspar's size and his appetite the object of ridicule. It may be well to point out that Hoffmann's character ate his soup because it was good for him, even necessary to life, not because it made him fat or "added flesh." As soon as the necessity to life and good health of the daily soup has been denied and its only virtue seen in terms of obesity, one cannot seriously expect a self-respecting child to feel any obligation to eat it.

The question that Fussy-Philip's father raises

Hoffmann	Literal
<u>"Ob der Philipp heute still Wohl bei Tische sitzen will?"</u> <u>Also sprach im ernstem Ton</u> <u>Der Papa zu seinem Sohn.</u>	"Whether [I wonder if] Philip will behave at the table today?" Thus spoke the father earnestly to his son.

is rendered sarcastically by Twain as:

"Philip, if 'twon't make you ill,  
Try to sit a minute still."  
So, in earnest tone and rough  
Spake the father to his tough,

A father who speaks "rough" to his "tough" and employs sarcasm is not what is implied in the gentle but firm admonition of the original. Neither would this sort of language have recommended itself to any parent of Mark Twain's day interested in buying a book for his young son.

Where in "The History of Hanns Stare-in-the-Air," Twain pokes fun at Hanns with such expressions as "dripping bloke," "struggling dunderhead to hive" and "[he] never got it through his gourd that he was walking over-board...", Hoffmann is careful in the original "Geschichte vom Hanns Guck-in-die-Luft" never to belittle Hanns for his failing. Though the fishes may laugh at his plight, neither reader nor commentator ever does. The emphasis in Hoffmann's rhyme is on the accidents that take place as a



result of a regrettable failing on Hanns' part: He doesn't look where he is going; he is a day-dreamer but that does not make him stupid or the object of scorn. When Hanns is retrieved from the river, Twain describes the water streaming from both hair and clothes, as does Hoffmann, but only the German writer tells us that Hanns is pitifully cold after his dunk. Though Twain encouraged the reader to laugh at the dreamy boy, Hoffmann wanted his reader to pity Hanns and to learn from his mistake.

Through a number of word choices that Twain makes in his translation of "The Story of Flying Robert," much of the original rhyme's didactic value is lost, as a comparison of Hoffmann's rhyme with Twain's version clearly demonstrates.

## Hoffmann

Wenn der Regen niederbraust,  
Wenn der Sturm das Feld durchsaust,  
Bleiben Mädchen oder Buben  
Hübsch daheim in ihren Stuben --  
Robert aber dachte: Nein!  
Das muss draussen herrlich sein! --  
Und im Felde patschet er  
Mit dem Regenschirm umher.

Hui, wie pfeift der Sturm und keucht,  
Dass der Baum sich niederbeugt!  
Seht! den Schirm erfasst der Wind,  
Und der Robert fliegt geschwind  
Durch die Luft, so hoch, so weit;  
Niemand hört ihn, wenn er schreit.  
An die Wolken stösst er schon,  
Und der Hut fliegt auch davon.

Schirm und Robert fliegen dort  
Durch die Wolken immerfort.

## Literal

When the rain comes down in  
 torrents,  
 When the gale whistles across  
 the field,  
 Girls or boys stay at home in  
 their rooms,  
 But Robert thought: No! It  
 must be just great outside!  
 And he splashes around the field  
 with his umbrella.

Ooh! How the wind whistles and  
 puffs  
 Making the tree bend over!  
 Look, the wind takes hold of  
 the umbrella  
 And Robert flies quickly through  
 the air  
 So high, so far;  
 No-one hears him, when he screams  
 He is already bumping into the  
 clouds.  
 And his hat is also flying away.

Robert and his umbrella continue  
 to fly through the air



Und der Hut fliegt weit voran,  
Stosst zuletzt am Himmel an.  
Wo der Wind sie hingetragen,  
Ja, das weiss kein Mensch zu sagen.

And his hat flies far in front,  
 Finally bumping into Heaven.  
 No-one can say where the wind  
 has carried them.

Twain

When the rain comes down a-dash,  
 When the storms the meadows lash,  
 Boys and girls stay snug at home  
 Preferring to let others roam;  
 But Robert thinks, "Ah, me; ah, me,  
 It's just the time outside to be!"  
 And so, umbrella'd safe and sound,  
 Takes to the fields and slops around.

My! how shrieks the windy storm,  
 And how the big tree bows its form!  
 Hoho! the 'brella's caught the breeze,  
 And Robert sails above the trees!  
 Above the houses, church and steeple,  
 And out of sight of all the people!  
 Above the clouds he spins at last,  
 His hat is gone, and he's aghast!

And so he sails and sails and sails,  
 Through banks of murky clouds, and wails,  
 And weeps and mourns, poor draggled rat,  
 Because he can't o'ertake his hat.  
 Oh, where on high can that hat be?  
 When you find out, pray come tell me.

Where Hoffmann emphasized Robert's contrary little mind in "Robert aber dachte: Nein!/ Das muss draussen herrlich sein!" ("But Robert thought, "No! It must be just great outside!"), Twain's Robert just says, "Ah, me/ ah, me,/ It's just the time outside to be!" The American writer described Robert as "umbrella'd safe and sound" when he "takes to the fields and slops around," while it was clearly Hoffmann's intention for his reader to think of Robert as being exposed to the elements and in danger as soon as he left the shelter of his home on a stormy day. The original rhyme describes a calamity in which the wind catches Robert's

umbrella and pulls the boy up into the sky. "No-one hears him, when he screams./ He is already bumping into the clouds./ And his hat is also flying away."

Twain, on the other hand, presents Robert's flight through the air as a wonderful adventure. Robert finally "wails and weeps and mourns poor draggled rat" but only "Because he can't o'ertake his hat." With the final lines

Oh, where on high can that hat be?  
When you find out, pray come tell me.

Twain negates all the seriousness of Hoffmann's rhyme. The incident is now simply an amusing one; all its original didactic value has been lost.

When Heinrich Hoffmann went out to buy a picture book for his young son Carl, the books he saw were geared more to the adult mind. If a picture of a horse, dog, bird, table, bench, pot or pan was shown, there would be a small note in a corner of the page informing the reader that the pictured object was  $1/3$ ,  $1/8$ , or  $1/10$  of the actual size.<sup>11</sup> Hoffmann recognized that the child was not concerned with such measurements, that for him or her the object represented on the page was the real thing.

The picture books Hoffmann found upon the booksellers' shelves contained moral admonitions: Be clean! Be careful with the matchbox and leave it alone! Be obedient! What disturbed Hoffmann about these books was not their attempt to teach good manners and morals, but that their psychology was all wrong. He reasoned that just pictures of the dirty

<sup>11</sup> G.A.E. Bogeng. Der Struwwelpeter und sein Vater: Geschichte eines Bilderbuchs. Potsdam: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1939, p. 37.

fellow Struwwelpeter, of the burning dress, of the boy who had an accident because of his carelessness, were instructive and self-explanatory enough to bring a stubborn little spirit to submission.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Hoffmann's hunch was right. His book has been loved by children everywhere and may have done more teaching of good behavior than any children's book ever written. To this day, parents in Germany and Austria admonish their children to think of the fate of Hoffmann's luckless little heroes and heroines.

When Mark Twain sat down to translate Der Struwwelpeter and duplicate its success on the American market, he neglected to take its importance as a teaching tool into consideration. As a humorist more concerned with the volume's entertainment value, Twain failed to see that two important conditions needed to be met to make Slovenly Peter the same kind of success Hoffmann's work had been: It had to be written on a level comprehensible to young children; and a clear, unobstructed lesson had to be presented in each tale. Twain's work is lacking on both these counts. His jingles are replete with words and turns of phrases that no child of six or seven could understand and the moral of the original jingles is obstructed again and again by the often humorous changes that Twain made in the German text. Hoffmann's Der Struwwelpeter instructed while it entertained the young reader. Twain's jingles place entertainment, not of the child, but of the adult, in the foreground. His work is full of humor and he has succeeded in producing rhymes that are 'catchy' and pleasing to the ear.

<sup>12</sup> Bogeng, p. 38.

Considering Twain's lifelong fascination with the reversal of the roles of the good and bad little boy (a reversal in which the bad boy turns out to be much better than the apparently obedient little fellow the grownups are quick to praise), it is conceivable that he may have found the temptation to sabotage Hoffmann's work too great.<sup>13</sup>

Twain worked feverishly for three days and nights to write Slovenly Peter; however, once his initial enthusiasm had abated, he may have realized that the work he had written was substantially different from the original. Whatever the case, Twain put his Slovenly Peter aside and did not try to publish it again, turning instead to other writing projects to extricate himself from the financial muddle he was in.

<sup>13</sup> Such role reversals can be easily observed in Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and in "The Story of the Bad Little Boy."



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